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AN ESSAY,

Read before the Stroudsburg Philomathean Society,

BY STEPHEN HOLMES, JR.,

November 12, 1858.

THE AGE WE LIVE IN.

The age in which we live is the most remarkable one that the world has ever seen. It is curious in many respects, and volumes might be filled, in treating of its merits, its marvels, and its monstrosities. As it is, the limited space of a simple Essay, will oblige us to condense our remarks into the smallest space compatible with any degree of justice to our topic.

For this purpose we shall make those divisions in our subject, which appear to be most obvious. These are four in number, and are as follows: 1st, Peculiarities of the age; 2d, Comparison with the preceding ages; 3d, Achievements of the age; 4th, The wants of the age. We shall treat of them in their order.

1st, then. The peculiarities of the Age. These are numerous and very striking, when contrasted with those of any preceding age. There is an intense energy of action, an exclusive devotion to legitimate business pursuits, a keenness of intellect, a freedom of *thinking* and a promptness of *doing*, unknown in the previous history of the world. It is a time when the wits of men are honed down to the last degree of razor-like sharpness, by constant rubbing and jostling together in competition, and when keen necessity, than whom there can be no more vigorous incentive, trains and develops every faculty to its utmost extent. It is a time when every body who would keep pace with his fellows, must be on the alert; there must be no drowsiness, no dreaming, otherwise, the one who indulges in it, will soon find himself elbowed out of the way by some more enterprising and energetic competitor, or perchance will awake to find himself floundering in the mud at the bottom of the hill.

It is an age of *practical utility*, when nothing can be popular, that is not strictly useful "What is the use?" "Will it pay?" These are the first questions which are asked concerning any innovation, new enterprise or business pursuit.

Money is the grand incentive to every action—gold, the object for which all men toil,—the aim and end of the existence of the man of the Nineteenth Century; and practical utility, the hobby upon which he strives to reach the desired object.

Your model, modern man has eradicated from his soul every spark of sentiment, of poetry or of romance. *He* never reflects on the *beauties*, only the *uses* of Nature. He sees no loveliness in the flowers and grasses beneath his feet, except in those which furnish his cows with food; he hears no music in the warble of the birds over his head, or in the murmuring water-fall; but is fully alive to the conviction that the one will protect his crops from noxious insects, and that the other would be a good site for a Grist Mill: never goes into raptures over a golden fringed cloud, or a balmy breeze, but only wonders whether they prognosticate a drenching for his new-mown hay; does not credit the Poet's tale about the *silvery moonbeams*, but has an inkling that if it *should* be true it might be a profitable investment, to organize a company for the purpose of coining them into new quarters. He thinks the *Milky Way* would be a good place to establish a *dairy*; and wonders whether he couldn't make something, by selling the Comet's *tail* to the Editor of the *New York Ledger*.

He is a cool calculator, a shrewd man at a bargain, and a good financier. He is ever alive to his own interests, and the most direct avenue to his *heart* is through his *pocket*. He is legally an honest man, though perhaps not strictly *morally* so: He does everything that the law requires, and refrains from doing every thing that the law prohibits, but outside of that boundary, has no serious scruples;—the Bible, he regards as a very good book, mostly adapted to the use of Clergymen, but he has no time to investigate the matter himself.

He takes a daily paper, perhaps several of them; but the only kinds of literature suited to his taste, are the Reports of Prices Current, the Stock Market, and an occasional budget of political news, which together with the contents of his Day Book and Ledger, furnish him with quite enough in the literary line.

In the sciences, too, he is equally practical. He does not see any particular use in a man's wasting his existence in trying to ascertain the distance from here to the planet Jupiter, nor can he conceive what difference it can make in the price of Bread and Butter, whether the Earth goes around the Sun, or the Sun around the Earth; or whether one combination of acids forms a harmless and convenient article for domestic use, and another combination of the same ingredients forms a deadly poison. It is quite sufficient for him to know by experience, that certain kinds of manures are best adapted to certain kinds of soil, to understand the right phase of the moon in which to "kill his pork,"—the sublime precepts of the Multiplication Table, and the glorious principles of Discount and Interest.

This is but a faint shadow of the practical man as we find him the representative of the times in which he lives. The picture is not overdrawn, our pen fails to do even justice to his peculiar qualities. He has many virtues and many admirable traits, but there are many dark shades also in his character and composition, the chief of which is this frenzy, this exclusive passion for *utility*, and utility alone, by which he deadens his senses to the most beautiful and lovely parts of creation, and shuts out from himself much genuine enjoyment.

Another peculiarity of the age may be specified. It is the age of humbugs, of counterfeits and of swindles. An age when a great deal of *sound* supplies the lack of a great deal of *sense*;—an age when most men take a superficial view of every thing around them, and when a fair exterior serves most effectually to conceal the rottenness and corruption within.

It is the age of wooley horses, of bogus patriotism, of faithless politicians, spurious marvels, and hum-drum nostrums;—of divers novel expedients for *making* money, and various new-fangled ways of *spending* it. It is a time when men buy glory by the dollars' worth, and get their change back;—when corruption and fraud hold high places in the government of nations, and when men are made and ruined with wonderful and unparalelled rapidity.

Another distinguishing characteristic of the present age, and one which a faithful chronicler of the times must by no means omit to mention, is a genus commonly denominated "Young America." He is peculiar only to the times in which we live; his like is nowhere to be found in the history of the past,—he is a native of our own time and clime. He is to be recognized everywhere; in all public places,—he is a prominent feature in every occurrence;—he may with propriety be styled the *nose* of the Nineteenth Century; he is a fixed fact, a geometrical certainty. He is a peculiarity so universally known and so easily recognized, that all comment or description is unnecessary.

We have now enumerated some of the most striking peculiarities of our times, and having thus disposed of the first division of our subject, we will next proceed to compare these peculiarities with those of preceding ages.

2d. And in looking over the history of the past, many wide differences in the customs and manners of the people, and in the political aspects of the world, will naturally thrust themselves upon our observation.

Glancing back to the early stages of civilization, we see men devoting themselves exclusively to the arts and achievments of war. A continuous din of arms resounded throughout the length and breadth of the then known world. Conquest followed conquest, and revolution, revolution,—invaders were themselves invaded, and conquerors were in their turn conquered, until the soil which brothers should have cultivated in harmony together, was made reeking with their blood. The kite seized the dove, the hawk seized the kite, and the eagle devoured the hawk. He ruled, who was the strongest, and wrongs were righted and rights wronged, by dint of hard blows and dissevered heads. The arts of peace and the tranquility of domestic life were unknown. Cut throat vagabonds, too lazy to work, wandered on horse back, over the land, clad in steel from top to toe, in search of adventure or plunder; or perhaps like Don Quixote, fighting most valiantly against inimical windmills.

Coming down to more recent times; we find monarchial forms of government alone in vogue. Education and position were confined to a few of the nobility only;—the great mass of the people being mere serfs or slaves, laboring to support in luxury and ease, a despotic and titled aristocracy.

How marked the contrast at the present day! *We* boast of a land where *all* are freemen,—*all* are noblemen:—where every boy can read, and where the veriest beggar is better educated and better clothed and fed, than was the English peasant of two centuries ago. We live in a time and in a clime where the people make their *own* laws, and where the only ruler we acknowledge, is a good old gentleman by the name of *Majority*;—when monarchies are getting to be unpopular, and when it is universally admitted that the best form of government is where the people govern themselves. The tactics and machinery for human slaughter, no longer claim exclusive attention; the war horse has been harnessed to the plow,—the sword and the helmet have been manufactured into steel pens, and ladies' hoops, and the roar and tumult of battle, have given place to the hum of the factory spindle, and the ring of the blacksmith's anvil.

Men, no longer ambitious of cutting each others throats, satisfy their thirst for blood by skinning each other on Wall street, and shaving paper at 99½ per cent. The system of robbery and plunder prevailing in those barbaric ages, has been remodelled and adapted to the refinement and civilization of more modern times; and so well is it suited to the wants and conveniences of the community, and so beautifully does it work in practice, that men can now be robbed with the greatest facility and in the most humane and considerate manner. This is one great evidence of the onward march of civilization. The pickpocket, the garote, the swell mob, the drop game, are among the refinements and luxuries of this generation, and tho' they might more properly be classed among the *achievements* of the age, in our third division, yet they may be introduced here to make more distinct the contrast between the present age, and those rude and benighted ones which have gone before.

Our great and glorious nation is not now distracted by feudal and intestine wars, as has been the case with other nations in the history of the past; it is not divided into hostile clans eternally at war, the one with the other; but it is one vast brotherhood, composed of concordant spirits dwelling together in harmony, cheating each other in the most legal and christian-like manner; and whose worthy Representatives in the Congressional Halls settle their little differences, as it becomes Statesmen and scholars of the Nineteenth Century, so to do, with canes and carving knives.

Another great and important distinction between the present and former ages, is in the department of Literature. The present, unlike the past, has produced no great literary work. It can boast of no intellectual prodigy like Homer, Virgil, Milton or Shakespeare. The world does not look for another Illiad: in the domain of Literature, those master spirits of the past will ever reign triumphant, unapproached and unapproachable. One great reason of this, has been before mentioned;—it is because the attention of the age has been directed elsewhere. It is the hobby of this generation to make rail-roads and canals, and not poems or tragedies. It is this practical, commonplace sentiment which precludes the probability of any great, immortal literary production. The man who digs ditches, and drives mules, is more needed and better rewarded, than is he who adorns the literature of his country; and, in these days of utility, a *patent mouse-trap* is better capital than an *epic poem*. Had Homer, Virgil or Will. Shakspeare lived in these days, they would have been inevitably obliged to give up the cultivation of the muse, and go to raising cabbages and turnips. Nay, should even that classic steed, Pegasus, himself, from time immemorial the exclusive property of the muses; should even he, by chance, alight upon these utilitarian shores, the probability is that he would be promptly harnessed to a Broadway omnibus, or trained to serve in a modern threshing machine.

3d. *The Achievements* of the age, are many and important. Among them may be mentioned the laying of the Atlantic Cable, which *is* an achievement, even though the primary object of the enterprise, has been, for the time being, defeated. It is an achievement, because it demonstrates what man may do by repeated and persevering efforts. It is an achievement, because the failure of this attempt will serve as a stepping stone to the perfect success of some future one.

The greatest achievements of the age have had for their object, to facilitate the intercourse of men with each other; to increase the means and the rapidity of communication;—to economise time.—Those objects have succeeded, and they have been of incalculable benefit to man. Men of the present day have adopted a style of locomotion, and an agent for transmitting messages, undreamed of in the philosophy of their grandfathers.—These facilities for communication, together with improvements in the art of printing, by which the cost of publication has been so much reduced as to place good books within the reach of all; these have been the most effective agents in ameliorating the condition of man. The Inventor and the Mechanic have been the greatest benefactors of their race.

4th. But in conclusion we will take a cursory glance at the remaining division of our subject; viz. The wants of the age. What the present age is most in need of, is not men of great genius,—for geniuses are generally good for nothing;—but *practical, honest, hard-handed and true hearted men*,—men of iron will and strong muscles,—men of industry, of prudence, and of sobriety; men who can wield the hammer and the ax; men who can dig the ore, fell the forest, till the soil, and protect with tongue, with pen and with arm, the rights and the sanctity of the Ballot Box, and the principle that the will of the majority *shall* rule. These are the men who are most especially wanted in our own country. We want a degree of general intelligence diffused among the masses of the people. We want every citizen of America educated to a sense of the responsibilities resting upon him, and of the duties which he is expected to perform. This is especially to be desired in those who are to exercise the right of voting. They should know their own power, and be taught how to use it, and not like the horse, blindly ignorant of his own strength, serve only as a passive instrument to forward the ends of their crafty and designing masters.

We have now but barely glanced at the various trains of thought, suggested by this subject. We would like to pursue the theme further, for it is one on which much remains to be said, and that too by abler pens than ours, but our time and space will not suffice; and therefore, brother Philomaths, begging your pardon for troubling you so long, and thanking you for your kind attention, we bid you good Evening.

An Exciting Sea Story of the Revolution.

SEAWAIF;

OR, THE

TERROR OF THE COAST.

A TALE OF PRIVATEERING IN 1776.

CHAPTER I.

"I'd like to know your history, Captain Seawaif—I'd like very much to know your history, sir! I think I've a right to sir—a *right*, you understand. And if there is any *one* thing which I stick out for more peremptorily than another, it is right, sir—*right!* That is why I, Phineas Cringle, merchant, *et-cet-e-ra, et-cet-e-ra*, am an open and avowed patriot, sir. Old England is wrong, and Young America is right. Therefore, I'm with her.—You are a young man, yet you may come so well recommended to me as a skillful seaman, a fearless man and an honest one, withal, that I like you, though you're not so rough in the figure-head as good sea-dogs generally are. I have given you command of the 'Tyrannicide,' as good a craft as floats on salt water—well manned, well officered, well armed, *et-cet-era, et-cet-e-ra*; and I know that she'll be well commanded. But your history, sir, your history!"

"At present, I have no history worth listening to, Mr. Cringle; but I will try to write one with my sword which all the world can read!"

This conversation occurred at the commencement of that revolution which gave freedom to the United Colonies of America, in the store of the first speaker, Mr. Phineas Cringle, "merchant, *et-cet-e-ra*," as he always called himself.

He was a curious, but a good old man—very eccentric in his ways, but as sound at heart as a young, unshaken oak. His age was full sixty, and his long, natural hair was white as snow, and hung in masses down his neck; but his close-shaven face was as smooth and as rosy almost as that of Kate Cringle, his blooming daughter, who was just eighteen.

Mr. Cringle's short, thick-set figure was dressed in a claret, shad-bellied coat, buff waistcoat, knee-breeches, (claret, like his coat) white cotton long hose, with immense silver buckles in his shoes. Upon his head he wore the tri-cornered continental hat of the day, with a red white and blue cockade placed so conspicuously on it, that all who looked might see that he did not fear to wear the sign of a patriot American.

The person whom he spoke to was a young man, probably twenty-five years of age. His eyes were large, dark blue, and shaded by long brown lashes; his flowing hair and soft, glossy beard was of a rich, dark brown; his figure was slight, yet very graceful; his entire appearance quiet, and exceedingly genteel. But when his eye looked upon you, there was a something in its cold; clear depth—a something in the expression of his curved lip, that told you, that when manhood was needed, he was there, in spite of the delicacy of his appearance. His dress was a naval frock-coat, with epaulet straps upon the shoulders, plain pantaloons and boots, and a blue naval cap. He wore no weapons there—yet he looked like one who could wear a sword gracefully, and use it skillfully.

"You can at least tell me where you was born, sir!" said Mr. Cringle, pursuing his object.

"I cannot tell you where I was born, or even who my father or mother was," replied the young captain. "As my name indicates, I am literally a *waif* of the *sea*. Drifted ashore from a wreck upon a little island at the south-west corner of Nantucket Shoal, I was taken from a chest into which I had been laid by the hands of a noble and good old man who had left the world to live a hermit life there. He named me Edward Seawaif—the first name his own; the latter in remembrance of the manner in which I came to him.—No living thing but myself reached the land. That old man, Edward Zane, was more than father or mother to me—he hated a world which had wronged him much; but he loved me all the more that I had seen nothing of it. To him I owe everything."

"You had no history, you said, sir!—No history, indeed!" cried Mr. Cringle. "Why, sir, already you are a hero of romance. I *must* find out who your father and mother were, *et-cet-e-ra, et-cet e-ra!* Was there nothing beside you in the chest when the good old man found you!"

"Yes, sir—a Bible, a quantity of clothing and jewels—some of it evidently belonging to a lady of rank and fashion; for it was very rich."

"Any name in the Bible, on the jewelry or clothing, *et cet-e-ra?*"

"No, sir, none—except a crest and coat of-arms that were on a seal ring, and also engraved on various articles of Jewelry which I possess; for when the good old hermit died, he begged me to keep them—in hopes that they might lead to the discovery of my family."

"Yes he was right—very right. What was this crest and coat-of-arms?" asked the merchant.

"Two arms and hands grasping crossed swords over a coronet, for the crest; a shield with diamonds and *fleur de lis* for the coat-of-arms."

"Umph—noble blood: the *fleur de lis* is French, or was once!" said the old merchant writing in his memorandum-book. "I've got something to do—I'll find out who your parents were or are (for they may yet be living), if I have to hunt over the heraldy of all the world. But, come up stairs, captain, we'll take a glass of punch of daughter Kate's brewing; and then we'll go aboard of the 'Tyrannicide,' and see how matters go there. I suppose you'll go to sea in the morning!"

"Yes, sir," said Seawaif, following the merchant to the dwelling part of his house, which was in the upper part of his store and ware-house—a thing very common in those days.

CHAPTER II.

"Isn't she a beauty! Taut and neat aloft, trim and sauey below, *et-cet-er-a!*" said Mr. Cringle, as he and the young captain stood upon the wharf, and looked at a craft which lay at anchor in the little harbor.

She was, for that era, astonishingly *clipperish*, raking in spars, sharp in hull, and calculated to carry an astonishing quantitity of canvas. Her rig was that of a two-topsail schooner—her lower masts being very long and heavy, so as to carry large fore-and-aft sails. Her tonnage appeared to be about three hundred tons. She was pierced for eight twenty-four pound caronades on a side; and a long brass thirty-two pounder, working on a pivot, shone bright as gold between her masts, mounted high enough to work above her hammock nettings. Around her masts could be seen the gleam of boarding-pikes and battle axes. At her main-mast head a blood red flag floated out bearing the motto: "*Death to Tyrants and their Tools!*" At the fore-truck, another red flag bore the name of the schooner—"THE TYRANNICIDE." Her figure-head was a serpent striking its fangs into the heart of a man who wore a crown. Taking her altogether, she was indeed a sauey and dangerous-looking craft, calculated to both sail and fight well. Upon her deck many men could be seen, showing that if she had "teeth," she had also strength to use them.

The young captain did not reply to the proud owner's remarks, but, with an equally exulting eye, looked at the handsome vessel, while a boat which he had signaled, rapidly approached the shore.

It was surf-built, pulled by eight sturdy young men, and an officer, also young, but a bold and handsome boy, steered her. In a few moments, she was at the pier. The young officer touched his hat, and said:

"If you please, Captain Seawaif, you had better hasten aboard.

"Why, Mr. Morley, what is the matter there?" asked the captain, as he and Mr. Cringle sprang into the boat.

"The surgeon, sir, Dr. La Motte, has had a quarrel with Mr. Doolittle, the first officer, sir, and has challenged him to a duel. I believe they were getting arms to settle the matter when I left, sir."

"Ah! quarreling already? I'll give them a chance to fight our country's *foes*, not her *friends*, soon!" said Captain Seawaif. "Give way with a will, men," he added, to those at the oars; "put me along side in a hurry—I hear the clash of steel!"

But a few moments elapsed ere the boat reached the schooner's gangway.

The captain scarcely touched the man-ropes as he leaped over the side, with a frown on his pale brow, and an angry light in his dark eye.

And he came just in time; for one of the combattants, his first officer, was tremendously hard pressed by his opponent, who, using a long, slim rapier, of matchless steel with consumate skill, was far superior to the other, who had the short, curved cutlass, much used by seamen at that day. While the amazed, yet amused crew of the vessel looked on, the Frenchman had made lunge after lunge at the officer, making remarks at each lunge, which brought shouts of laughter from the men.

"Ah, ha! Monsieur *Do-leetle*; I make you do *someseeng* now, eh!" he would cry, as he made a lunge, which the officer, standing solely on the defensive, barely succeeded in parrying. "How you like ze frog-sticksare, in ze hands of ze frog-eatare, eh!" he would add, as his keen blade, doubling over the stiff one of his adversary, narrowly escaped a sheath in the bosom of the latter.

"Hold here, HOLD!" cried Seawaif, sternly, as he stepped between the combattants, who instantly lowered the points of their weapons. "What means this breach of discipline in officers, and upon my quarter-deck, which should and *shall* be as inviolate as a church to all who belong upon it!"

The attitude and look of the combatants at this instant was most striking.—The Frenchman, who was very lean and tall, had cast off, not only his cap, but his wig, leaving his perfectly bald head exposed. He was in his shirt-sleeves, also, and wore the tightest kind of black breeches and stockings, making his very active, but diminutive legs look even smaller than they were. His moustache, which was thick and heavy, was twisted ferociously over toward each ear, which it nearly touched.

Mr. Doolittle was equally long and lank; but he wore a seaman's loose trowsers, which, though they fitted at the waist in spider-like tightness, spread out Turkishly below, and there concealed the slender shanks of bone and skin. His loose shirt, bulging out above his slim waist, gave an idea that there was an expansion of chest and body there; but in vain had the rapier of Doctor La motte, in several passages through the garment, sought for more solid material than cotton shirting. His face was smooth, and his long, straight hair seemed to have been plastered to his cheeks with tallow, or some other substance, of its own dirty-white color.

"What means this quarrel? Speak, gentlemen, I will permit no trifling here!"

"I guess it wouldnt have been a *trifle*, if the doctor had run his tarnal toad-sticker through my gizzard!" said Mr. Doolittle. "But, cap'n, I reckon I was in the wrong! The doctor ordered some fried frogs on the table, and I said I'd rather eat stewed kittins. He twitted me about eating pork and molasses, and I talked back rather sauey; and he wanted to fight, and I accommodated him. That's all sir—I'm the one to blame!"

"No, Monsier Doolcetle, 'scuse me if you sail please—you are *tont genereuse*.—I, sare, am ze shentilhomme zat is to blame. Monsieur le Capitaine, I shall make one grande apology to your quarter-deck—*tres* grande to Monsieur Doolcetle, and more zan zat to you, sare! I vil make once more fronts wiz Monsieur Doolcetle; and if at any time he have a shot in ze leg, or ze arm, I vill take zem off as easy as pull a toot!"

"Thank ye; I hope you'll not have any chance for such operations," said the officer; "but here's my hand, and if the cap'n will excuse us this time, we'll be as fast friends as ever.

"Eh! bien—zat is one grande idea, Monsieur Doolcetle. I nevare shall observe if you eat pork wiz molasses any more," said La Motte, grasping the extended hand.

"And you may eat frogs till you croak, doctor, before I find fault with you again," said the naturally good hearted mate.

The captain smiled, and went down into the cabin with Mr. Cringle; whither, after the doctor had recovered his wig, cap, and coat, they were followed by him and Mr. Doolittle.

"Gentlemen, this has been the first difficulty on board; let it be the last, and it shall be excused," said the young commander. "Save your strength and your steel for America's foes—I will soon place you where you'll have work enough to do with them."